

Thomas Jefferson to Rufus King, July 13, 1802, with Draft, from The Works of Thomas Jefferson in Twelve Volumes. Federal Edition. Collected and Edited by Paul Leicester Ford.

TO THE U. S. MINISTER TO GREAT BRITAIN J. MSS. (RUFUS KING)

Washington, July 13, 1802.

Dear Sir, —The course of things in the neighbouring islands of the West Indies appears to have given a considerable impulse to the minds of the slaves in different parts of the U. S. A great disposition to insurgency has manifested itself among them, which, in one instance, in the state of Virginia, broke out into actual insurrection. This was easily suppressed: but many of those concerned, (between 20. and 30. I believe) fell victims to the law. So extensive an execution could not but excite sensibility in the public mind, and beget a regret that the laws had not provided, for such cases, some alternative, combining more mildness with equal efficacy. The legislature of the state, at a subsequent meeting, took the subject into consideration, and have communicated to me through the governor of the state, their wish that some place could be provided, out of the limits of the U. S. to which slaves guilty of insurgency might be transported; and they have particularly looked to Africa as offering the most desirable receptacle. We might for this purpose, enter into negotiations with the natives, on some part of the coast, to obtain a settlement, and, by establishing an African company, combine with it commercial operations, which might not only reimburse expenses but procure profit also. But there being already such an establishment on that coast by the English Sierre Leone Company, made for the express purpose of colonizing civilized blacks to that country, it would seem better, by incorporating our emigrants with theirs, to make one strong rather than two weak colonies. This would

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be the more desirable because the blacks settled at Sierre Leone, having chiefly gone from these states would often receive among those we should send, their acquaintances and relations. The object of this letter, therefore, is to ask the favor of you to enter into conference with such persons private and public as would be necessary to give us permission to send thither the persons under contemplation. It is material to observe that they are not felons, or common malefactors,

but persons guilty of what the safety of society, under actual circumstances, obliges us to treat as a crime, but which their feelings may represent in a far different shape. They are such as will be a valuable acquisition to the settlement already existing there, and well calculated to cooperate in the plan of civilization.

As the expense of so distant a transportation would be very heavy, and might weigh unfavorable in deciding between the modes of punishment, it is very desirable that it should be lessened as much as is practicable. If the regulations of the place would permit these emigrants to dispose of themselves, as the Germans and others do who come to this country poor, by giving their labor for a certain term to some one who will pay their passage; and if the master of the vessel could be permitted to carry articles of commerce from this country and take back others from that which might yield him a mercantile profit sufficient to cover the expenses of the voyage, a serious difficulty would be removed. I will ask your attention therefore to arrangements necessary for this purpose.

The consequences of permitting emancipations to become extensive, unless a condition of emigration be annexed to them, furnish also matter of solicitude to the legislature of Virginia, as you will perceive by their resolution inclosed to you. Although provision for the settlement of emancipated negroes might perhaps be obtainable nearer home than Africa, yet it is desirable that we should be free to expatriate this description of people also to the colony of Sierre Leone, if considerations respecting either themselves or us should render it more expedient. I pray you therefore to get the same commission extended to the reception of these as well as those first mentioned. Nor will there be a selection of

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bad subjects; the emancipations for the most part being either of the whole slaves of the master, or of such individuals as have particularly deserved well. The latter is most frequent.

The request of the legislature of Virginia having produced to me this occasion of addressing you I avail myself of it to assure you of my perfect satisfaction with the manner in which you have conducted the several matters con

-fided to you by us; and to express my hope that through your agency we may be able to remove everything inauspicious to a cordial friendship between this country and the one in which you are stationed: a friendship dictated by too many considerations not to be felt by the wise and the dispassionate of both nations. It is therefore with the sincerest pleasure I have observed on the part of the British government various manifestations of just and friendly disposition towards us.¹ We wish to cultivate peace and

¹ In the draft, the following paragraph is stricken out.

“These seeds are not sown in barren ground. I have too high an opinion of the understanding of those at the helm of British affairs to suppose they judge of the dispositions of this administration from the miserable trash of the public papers; and I trust they have more respect for our understandings than to suppose we are gallomen or anglomen, or anything but Americans and the friends of our friends. Peace and friendship is essentially with all other nations.”

friendship with all nations, believing that course most conducive to the welfare of our own. It is natural that these friendships should bear some proportion to the common interests of the parties. The interesting relations between Great Britain and the U. S. are certainly of the first order; and as such are estimated, and will be faithfully cultivated by us. These sentiments have been communicated to you from time to time in the official correspondence of the secretary of state: but I have thought it might not be unacceptable to be assured that they perfectly concur with my own personal conviction, both in relation

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to yourself and the country in which you are. I pray you to accept assurances of my high consideration and respect.